

'Best places' lists include Franklin and Williamson CNN/*Money Magazine* poll is considered 'third-party validation'

BY KEVIN WALTERS • THE TENNESSEAN • JULY 15, 2010

Franklin and Williamson County have made another "best of" list.

A just-released CNN/*Money Magazine* poll touts Franklin as No. 66 out of 100 small U.S. cities listed among the best places to live in a comparison of cities with populations between 50,000 and 300,000.

Franklin is the only Tennessee city to make the list, which is part of the magazine's August issue.

In a separate list, the magazine also ranked Williamson County as No. 22 among the 25 communities with the most job growth during the past decade. Franklin had a 29.8 percent job growth rate from 2000 to 2009.

The notices are the latest national accolades for Williamson County and a new tool to help draw more attention and possible recruitment of companies.

"This is third-party validation of all the things we do," said Matt Largen, the county's economic development director. "We use this to tell the story and illustrate why companies have been coming here and they're expanding over the last 10 years.

Using statistics from Onboard Informatics, the magazine compared cities' populations, median incomes, sales tax rates and other figures to create its rankings. Last year, the magazine compared small towns that had populations between 8,500 and 50,000. Franklin's estimated population is just under 60,000.

Some communities excluded

The magazine used a bevy of statistics, including quality-of-life factors. It excluded cities where the median family income is more than 200 percent or less than 85 percent of the state median and those where the racial makeup is more than 95 percent white. Franklin has a median family income of \$95,000.

It also did not include retirement communities, towns with significant job loss and those with poor education and crime scores.

Eden Prairie, Minn., was ranked the No. 1 place in the nation with Columbia/Ellicott City, Md., in the No. 2 position.

The notices were the latest in two months' time for Franklin. In May, *Businessweek* ranked Franklin as the eighth-best city for entrepreneurs to make their mark.

Last year, readers of *Southern Living* magazine ranked Franklin as the fifth-best small town in its Readers' Choice Awards. The American Planning Association named Franklin's 16-block downtown district as one of the 10 great neighborhoods in its Great Places in America Program.

But do polls and accolades such as these really matter when it comes to business recruitment?

Largen says they can help make an impression and he often plays them up when recruiting companies to Williamson County.

"It gives me another opportunity to communicate a positive message for those companies that might be on the fence right now," Largen said.